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THE AREA

Union County Conservation Area encompasses 6,202 acres and is in the Lower Mississippi River Bottomlands Division of Illinois. Numerous shallow sloughs and other water areas totaling approximately 850 acres are scattered throughout the area. More prominent water areas include Grassy Lake with 350 acres and Lyerla Lake with 275 acres.

Of the 5,350-acre land area, approximately 2,500 acres are under cultivation. The remaining acreage is in timber, brush or permanent grass cover. By far the most intensive operation on the area is farming. Each year a variety of hard grain and green forage crops are planted and left standing to provide food for wintering geese. More than 2,500 acres of corn, milo, sunflower, wheat, clover and other crops are established for this purpose.

Union County Conservation Area is a haven for many diverse forms of wildlife. The most prominent throughout five months of the year is the phenomenal flock of Canada geese and other waterfowl which winter on the area. White-tailed deer, bald and golden eagles and many other interesting types of wildlife are commonly observed by visitors to the area.

Three management zones are recognized on the area. Recreational use and management practices vary according to zone. Public use of interior gravel roads is restricted except when permission is granted for special circumstances such as student research, tours and open house.

REFUGE ZONE

Public use in the refuge zone is limited to sightseeing and wildlife photography. No hunting is allowed. In order to avoid disturbance of waterfowl on the area, no day use or overnight facilities have been developed.

Throughout the fall and winter months, thousands of Canada geese are concentrated along the Refuge Drive. Few places in Illinois exist where so many wild geese can be closely observed and photographed in their natural habitat.

Fishing is permitted in Grassy Lake from March 15 to October 15. Outboard motor size is limited to 10 horsepower or less. Grassy Lake is a shallow, fertile bottomland lake with catfish the primary sport fish attraction.

WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT AREA ZONE

Limited hunting opportunity is provided on the two waterfowl management areas. Area #1 offers the opportunity for taking ducks, geese, squirrel and deer. Few ducks are taken on this area due to the lack of water; however, when conditions are right, goose hunting on the "firing line" can be good. Hunters on the area must remain 200 yards from the refuge zone boundary and 100 yards away from private land boundaries.

Goose hunting on Area #2 is restricted. Ducks can be taken on Upper and Lower Bluff Lake when water conditions are conducive to waterfowl use. Deer, squirrel and other game may be taken on this area in accordance with applicable game code regulations.

PUBLIC HUNTING AREA ZONE

Approximately 2,050 acres at the south end of the Union County Conservation Area are designated as Public Hunting Area. Goose hunting is on a permit basis with permits being issued from the Springfield office upon application by interested hunters. Daily permit fee is $5.00 with blinds, decoys and transportation to the fields provided on the area. A total of 50 blinds can accommodate 100 hunters each day. A drawing is held each morning to allocate blinds to permit holders.

In addition to the hunting opportunity provided on the Public Hunting Area, 19 private goose hunting clubs in the surrounding area provide more than 16,000 man-days of goose hunting annually.

Excellent early spring and late summer bluegill and crappie fishing exists in Lyerla Lake. Fishing is permitted from March 15 thru October 15, with outboard motor size limited to 10 horsepower or less.

HISTORY

The Union County Conservation Area was acquired by the Illinois Department of Conservation in the late 1940's. Declining goose populations

throughout the early 40's prompted more intense management procedures. Restricted harvest and the provision of high quality refuge brought immediate recovery of goose numbers, so that the need for additional management lands became apparent. The Union County Conservation Area developed a wintering goose population in excess of 50,000 birds by 1964. Since then, controlled harvest through the quota system and continued provision of quality winter sanctuary and food have produced a total southern Illinois winter population of 300,000 Canada geese. The Union County segment of this population has grown to 85,000 birds. Horseshoe Lake Conservation Area in Alexander County and Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in Williamson County winter the remaining 215,000 geese.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

Admittance will not be granted groups of 25 or more persons to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the park ranger has been secured to use the facilities. It is also required that groups of minors have adequate supervision and that at least one responsible adult accompany each group not exceeding 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state parks and memorials are within easy access of every part of the state. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette, White Pines Forest and Giant City. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

All state parks are open the year round. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of park roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to park facilities is by foot only.

For more details about this site, contact Refuge Manager, R.R. 2, Jonesboro, Illinois 62952, phone 618/833-5175. For information on other Illinois sites, write the Department of Conservation, Information/Education Division, State Office Building, Springfield, 62706.

Please: This area is for all to enjoy so help keep it clean. Put all litter in the nearest available trash container. No flowers, plants, shrubs or trees may be removed or damaged. If you need help or have a question, contact the site manager.

Waterfowl Management Areas
Boundaries
Gravel Roads
Goose Hunting Area
Upper Bluff Lake
Clear Creek
Waterfowl Management Area 2
Lower Bluff Lake
Reynoldsville Road
Clear Creek Levee Road
Overnight Barrack
Forest Service Land
Waterfowl Management Area 1
Ill. Rt. 146
Refuge Headquarter
Refuge Road
Grassey Lake
Waterfowl Banding Trap Site
Barker Lake
Public Goose Hunting Area
Lyerla Lake
Public Goose Hunting Area
Hunter Check Station
Entrance to Goose Hunting Area
Ill. Rt. 3
Reynoldsville
To Ware
Ill. Rt. 3

Park Map

Trail of Tears State Forest
3
Anna
146
Jonesboro
Mississippi River
Union County Conservation Area
3
To Cairo
127
51

Illinois Department of Conservation

life and land together

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